

SENATE RESOLUTION 151

By Dixon

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Mrs. Mary Frances Robinson of Nashville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Mrs. Mary Frances Robinson; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson was an exemplary educator and a consummate pioneer and advocate for equality in her profession who worked assiduously to improve opportunities for her students to enhance their prospects in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, born June 8, 1922, in Nashville, Tennessee, the third of seven children, Mary Frances Kellum attended the schools of the city and finished second in her class at historic Pearl High School; in the fall of 1940, she matriculated at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, now Tennessee State University, and graduated in three years with a Bachelor of Arts degree; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson achieved the Dean's List her freshman year while carrying a full academic load and holding down a full-time job; she was inducted into Phi Beta Tau honor society and received numerous honors from the English Department; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson was awarded a full scholarship to Fisk University to pursue graduate studies in English; believing the scholarship to be for one year only, she pressed ahead and, even when advised by her dean that she could take more time, completed her work for a Master of Arts degree in English in one year; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson began teaching public school in 1944 at Woodstock, Tennessee, and later taught at Shelbyville; in 1947, she brought her considerable teaching abilities to the Nashville Public Schools where she served for the next 35 years, consistently earning the respect of her peers, superiors and students alike for the exemplary quality of her work; and

WHEREAS, in 1970, she was at the vanguard of African-American teachers selected to integrate the city's historically white schools, and her positive approach and optimism were highly valued for their influence in that era of tension and tentativeness; she was named "Teacher of the Year" by the student body at Hillwood High School and was by all accounts a truly phenomenal teacher; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson was actively engaged in professional teachers' organizations and was the first African-American teacher to sit on the "Teacher Panel" of the Nashville Board of Education and the first teacher ever elected from the Teachers Benefit Association, the African-American teachers' organization, to attend the National Education Association convention; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson consistently gave long hours to her teaching duties, making her home an "after-hours enrichment site" for students in need help and guidance, preparing them for tests, and helping them increase their vocabulary and to speak articulately and to believe in themselves; she was the champion of those written off by others, and many of her former students now live lives that are eloquent testimony to the value of her patience and persistence in prodding them to achieve their full potential; and

WHEREAS, in 1940, Mrs. Robinson met her future husband, James McKinley Robinson, and they were married on March 6, 1944, following his military service; Mr. and Mrs. Robinson recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Mr. Robinson is a retired Nashville Public Schools principal, having served at Rose Park Junior High School, Cameron High School and Wharton Elementary School; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson was an active and devout member of the Payne Chapel A.M.E. Church, where she and her husband served faithfully for many years, providing innovative and visionary leadership; an apt student of the Bible since age three in Sunday school, she also has been a member of Friendship Baptist Church and Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church; and

WHEREAS, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson were active leaders in their community and were inveterate travelers both in this country and abroad. Mrs. Robinson was an accomplishment bowler who won annual citywide tournaments in each of her first four decades of bowling; she coached her son, Kenneth, to a national bowling championship and regularly declined

invitations to join the National Women's Professional Bowling Association tour in order to stay home with her family; and

WHEREAS, always deeply devoted to her family, Mrs. Robinson endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; she enjoyed the loving companionship of her husband, James McKinley Robinson, and was the proud mother of James McKinley Robinson, Jr., a computer consultant and real estate advisor in Boston, Massachusetts, and Kenneth Stanley Robinson, M.D., Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Health and Pastor and Chief Executive Officer of St. Andrew A.M.E. Church in Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the daughter of a day worker and a master brick and stone mason, Mrs. Robinson knew her personal worth and deserved and demanded respect, as she crossed boundaries and entered uncharted waters during the final days of segregation; she insisted upon being addressed respectfully even as she patronized newly integrated establishments, a practice that eased the way for those who followed her; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson will be sorely missed by her husband, sons, and beloved granddaughters, Maisha and Nuriya, her other family members and a host of friends; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Robinson leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life and great courage, diligence and dedication in all her chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional educator, wife, mother and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we honor the memory of Mrs. Mary Frances Robinson, reflecting fondly upon her impeccable character and her stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Mrs. Robinson.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.